

# Musings on the Nature of Media: Is the Message Getting Through?

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During the development of the arts and sciences during the middle ages in the western world, and during the same period in the East, which was largely closed off to the West, a codified systematic form of creation of the arts and the reporting/explaining of the activities of art and news events was slowly emerging into what we now, today, call media.

But in order to understand the evolution of events which is reported to the public we must backtrack and look at the evolution of how this reportage found its way to the public. Usually in any event reported in the media, indeed, the current infrastructure of media, borrows its critical tools from the evolution of the explication of art. In the majority of cases, when a new art form emerges or evolves from a previous art form, with all of its attending linear and temporal implications, it is difficult to report on this new art form. For example, when the music composer Igor Stravinsky's Rite of Spring was premiered in the early 20th century, it was met with extreme derision; not only in the media of the time, but also with the general public. It was rumored that during the premier, concert goers threw tomatoes at the performers on stage.

Today, the Rite of Spring is a mainstream, even conservative, contemporary work by the standards of art music currently in the extant literature of contemporary music. Our task is to look at how a radical media event eventually enters the mainstream of art or popular culture.

Three forces of media inquiry come into play: 1) Contemporary Practice; 2) Theory; and 3) Analysis.

Usually, in the evolution of history, which is reported in the media, the temporal demarcations do not make for easy transitions. Of course, there are exceptions, usually, and unfortunately defined by war or aggression. In the media, we commonly call the period following World War II the "Post War" era. But many world events from 1945 to 9/11 have come into play, largely shaped by geo-political events. We might call these geo-political events "Contemporary Practice." As a result of these geo-political events a "Theory" of these events is formed, although the linear nature between events is not so clearly demarcated nor is it temporally cohesive.

As such, the media is involved in the "Analysis" of the "Theory" of "Contemporary Practice." We call this paradigm, the reportage of a "theory" or "Contemporary Practice;" media, news, contemporary/popular cultural and the temporal unfolding of the progression of world events/media/art.

Let us now turn to examples in media in order to explicate the thesis as set above. As we have mentioned, our world has been called, until 9/11, the "Post War Era." The events of 9/11 have now thrust us into the post "9/11 Era." But are the two temporal markers: 1945 and 9/11/2001 so easily defined as "Eras?" I would argue that they are not. Many events in the geo-political movements in the world led from one era to the other; some events in the foreground, such as contemporary news; and events in the background such as the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. This above example is one of many which might be

cited. We might call these events "Contemporary Practice." The news media, both televised and print have much leverage in shaping the public's perception of these temporal movements in history. Sociologists and the news media develop a "Theory" and their reportage is the "Analysis." However, while an actual event occurs; for example, the bombing of Iraq in 2003, the news, engaging in "Analysis" will give a different perception to the public of what the actual event was and its implications in geo-political politics.

Let us look at some examples of how the media looks at the bombing and subsequent war in Iraq. In America, today a largely conservative society under the presidency of George W. Bush, most Americans receive their information of world events through the print media or televised news. If one reads the New York Times, one is persuaded by the liberal view. Just the opposite occurs with the Chicago Tribune, a largely conservative newspaper. Even more accessible to the American public is the liberal CNN vs. the conservative FOX cable news network. Both networks claim to be "objective" with Fox even having a slogan of "Fair and Balanced News," an obvious pejorative slogan against the more liberal CNN and the American news in general. A new genre of talk radio has emerged which for the most part is conservative and influential.

Thus far we have only looked at America's news media. If one were to receive reports of Iraq from Al-Jazeera, the Arabic World televised news network, an entirely different reportage, along with its attending bias would emerge. Although the New York Times is considered a liberal newspaper, its European counterpart, "The Herald Tribune" is even more liberal. The same is true for European CNN; showing much more graphic events of the war with Iraq than the "sanitized" version of American television media—regardless of its liberal/conservative bias.

Now let us leave the world of news media and turn to art and how that shapes the public's perception of world events. Michael Moore, a controversial American documentary film maker hoped to swing the election away from the conservative George Bush to

the more liberal John Kerry. His documentary, or perhaps more accurately docu-drama Fahrenheit 9/11 was a huge success with the liberal public, and an anathema to the conservative American public. This documentary even inspired standing ovations at cinema theaters in America, a virtually unprecedented reaction. I viewed this documentary in Paris and it was met with the same reaction as any other film; which is to say without emotion.

But let us bring some critical tools of analysis to this documentary. The name itself is provocative: Fahrenheit 9/11. Fahrenheit, America's temperature standard may be seen when coupled with 9/11 as a "hot" or negative title casting aspersion on the Bush administration. By evoking 9/11, no analysis is necessary as the horrific events of that day are clear to the world. But it is the combinatorial aspect of these two concepts of temperature and disaster that work to define the documentary. Further, by evoking temperature, the moral pulse of the nation is questioned. Taken at face value, the name of the documentary is an ingenious use of a not so subliminal media manipulation.

Across the world, Osama Bin Laden, released to the western world, through the Al-Jazeera network, his own documentary/speech days before the presidential election; his own "documentary" suggesting that his Al-Qaida network has no problems or terrorist designs on those who are at peace with the Arabic/Muslim world. It was largely thought in America that the resplendent appearance of Osama bin Laden influenced the American public to return George Bush to office; the premise being that only George Bush had the "resolve" to fight the ideas which Mr. bin Laden espoused. But this type of media presentation was done, like with Michael Moore, through subliminal means: Michael Moore championed John Kerry; Osama bin Laden championed George Bush.

In retrospect, it is clear that the media plays an important role not only in shaping the national perceptions of its demographic, but also the perception of other nations and cultures. Media, and the social-political agendas which report to the people, and

especially at this juncture of unfolding global events, has a huge responsibility to "get the message through."

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## 概 要

# メディアの本質に関する熟考： メッセージは届いているのか？

マイケル・ミシラス

本論文は、メディアにおける矛盾およびテレビと活字メディアにおけるニュース報道を明らかにしようとするものである。様々なメディアの例、すなわち活字に関しては The New York Times, The Chicago Tribune, The Herald Tribune を、テレビに関しては CNN, FOX Network News, Al-Jazeera を引用することにより、様々な存在論的「真実」を明らかにする。

読者には本論文から、ニュースメディアが現象学的に見てニュースが発信される各国の偏見だけでなく、各国内でニュースを配信する会社の特定の偏見とも結びついているということが少しずつ学べることを期待する。